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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Initial report of States parties

Algeria*

Addendum

Evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

General information

As of 1 January 1998, the demographic data indicates that women account for 49.4 per cent of the total population (14,445,000 out of an estimated 29,724,000).

One hundred girls are born each year for every 105 boys, and women's average life expectancy at birth is 69 years.

Some 51.3 per cent of the female population is located in the urban areas, a circumstance which is generally accompanied by particular trends, including the following:

- Marriage is being postponed to the age of 26 years;
- The marriage rate has declined to 5.49 per cent;
- 34 per cent of married women are economically active; the rate is 51 per cent for unmarried women;
- 56.9 per cent of women of reproductive age (15–49 years) practise some type of birth control;
- 76 per cent of mothers give birth in settings where care is provided;
- The number of children per mother has dropped to 3.68 children.

However, economic and social constraints persist despite the impressive results attesting to progress in the advancement of women. More efforts are needed to limit assaults on the physical and moral integrity of women.

1. Education and literacy training for girls and women

The authorities have continued to express their determination in this area, ever since promulgation of the ordinance of 16 April 1976, which clearly proclaimed the principles of universal, free and compulsory schooling. This

* For the initial report submitted by the Government of Algeria, see CEDAW/C/DZA/1.

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action has been accompanied by measures to promote the schooling of girls, particularly in the disadvantaged regions of the country, where girls' education continues to conflict with attitudes incompatible with modern thinking and openness to the outside world. Of these measures, the following are noteworthy:

(a) The opening of school canteens and boarding schools, which serves a twofold objective in that it helps families living in economically difficult circumstances to keep their daughters in school, and solves a problem which is often cited by parents as a reason for taking their girls out of school, namely, the distance between school and home;

(b) The granting of scholarships and financial aid within the framework of school solidarity, to permit the purchase of school supplies and other materials needed to pursue normal schooling;

(c) The creation of treatment units composed of multidisciplinary teams responsible for diagnosing illness and other problems which might interfere with a child's development at school;

(d) Making textbooks available free of charge, in order to ensure that, if they have to make a choice parents do not use the inherent costs of education as an excuse for taking girls out of schools;

(e) Encouraging civil society to be active in the field of literacy training for girls who are beyond school age and for women who want to read and write, by means of purpose-built learning centres, in conjunction with the literacy campaign of the National Literacy Office, which was set up in 1964.

This qualitative assessment of the education of girls and literacy training of women is supported by the following statistics:

(a) One fourth of the State budget is devoted to education, which sector is the number-one employer of the Algerian Government;

(b) There are 15,200 primary schools, with a total of 4,674,947 students, of whom 2,164,300, or nearly 46.29 per cent are girls;

(c) There are some 3,200 middle schools, with a student population of 1,762,761, 45.61 per cent of whom are girls;

(d) There are 1,200 high schools, with a total of 855,481 students, 52.54 per cent of whom are girls;

(e) Women account for 45 per cent of all teachers; most women work in the middle cycle;

(f) There are 1,875 literacy centres and 48 literacy offices throughout the country, serving 49,000 women between ages 15 and 60;

(g) Awareness-raising is achieved primarily through literacy training, particularly in the field of family planning.

The enrolment rate for girls is about 90 per cent, but in the rural areas girls continue to drop out of school once they reach 10–13 years of age.

Efforts are also being made to decrease the illiteracy rate.

2. Health care

The first measure to be taken in this area since the World Conference involved the revitalization of the National Population Committee, the quality of membership and intersectoral action of which has, since 1996, resulted in major progress in the field of family planning.

The principal measures taken were aimed at improving maternal and child health. Increased use of family planning, essentially on the basis of the users' free choice, has had a beneficial effect on the birth rate, currently estimated at approximately 3.68 per thousand.

Communication between various elements of society has also played an important role in the results achieved to date. The contribution of various members of the administration and of organizations of civil society has been a key factor.

The health sector, like the State educational system, is also staffed primarily by women. During the past three years, the medical professions have remained the province of women, who account for 51.1 per cent of all posts therein. Even more encouraging is the fact that increasing numbers of women hold high-level posts in the medical profession.

Midwives account for nearly 40 per cent of health care workers and they therefore play an important role in educating people, particularly in respect of reproductive health.

Attention should also be drawn to the most recent Government decision concerning abortion: since April 1998, women who have been raped as a result of terrorist acts may have an abortion in order to preserve their physical and psychological well-being and to prevent them from abandoning the children which they would otherwise bear. Prior to this decision, only therapeutic abortions were recognized and authorized.

With respect to support services, steps have been taken to rationalize services to give women better access to health care and to observe the principle that family planning and early diagnosis of illness should be provided free of charge.

As part of the efforts to increase solidarity, poor and disadvantaged women are given medication for certain chronic illnesses and access to family planning free of charge.

3. Combating poverty and inequality

As is everywhere the case, it is women who remain most vulnerable to poverty and economic dependence, one of the reasons being that, traditionally, boys are given preferential treatment.

In 1994, the Government, aware of the need to remedy this situation, established a so-called "social safety net" whereby financial assistance is provided to the poorest families.

Thus, in 1998, 13.4 billion dinars was allocated to disadvantaged groups (nearly 1 million people). The recommended approach involves combating marginalization by creating jobs for which no specific qualifications are required.

Community development projects have also been launched which focus on women's role in combating the isolation of disadvantaged regions.

Efforts to combat poverty include subsidiary programmes of direct intervention aimed at eradicating social scourges and increasing awareness of the dangers of not vaccinating children and of the delinquency which may result from idleness.

This programme also includes the provision of assistance, in the form of microcredit, so that women who are of an age to work but who, for reasons of a social and cultural nature, are unable to do so, can acquire the means to work and to meet the needs of their families.

This has the added advantage of helping perpetuate traditional skills involved in certain types of work, such as handicrafts, which, for various reasons, are less frequently practised at present than in the past.

Thus, social benefits are partially provided and needy women are integrated into the workforce through flexible solutions which are not offensive to the recalcitrant minority of the population.

4. National mechanisms

In the specific area of the development of national mechanisms, and following the recommendations made in Beijing, the Secretariat of State to the Prime Minister, in charge of Solidarity and the Family, has been elevated first to a Ministry-Delegate under the same authority and then to a full Ministry. This Ministry is the focal point for all activities in the field of women's and family affairs.

In addition, a workshop on women's affairs was held in April 1996 and a national committee responsible for follow-up to, and implementation of, recommendations, with a membership representative of all political views and all parties concerned, has been established.

The range of mechanisms set up also includes the establishment of the National Population Committee and the committee responsible for preserving and promoting the family, in which the presence of women is considerable.

The statutory powers of the two structures point to a real, dynamic approach favouring the advancement of women.

This measure is also supported by the establishment of the Higher Councils for Education and Youth, in which the representation of women helps to advance efforts to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of girls.

Lastly, there are plans to establish in the near future a national women's council and a national monitoring centre for children.

5. Equality with regard to economic policies

Legal equality between men and women has always been maintained. The legislation and regulations governing the field of work have enshrined it through a number of clearly defined provisions favouring women, without, however, achieving de facto equality with regard to access to specific jobs.

Opportunities opened up quite naturally when large numbers of girls entered the field of vocational training for sectors that were traditionally reserved for men, such as the building trade, which greatly contributed to the increase in the number of available jobs and helped to raise the female employment rate (10 per cent, of which 53 per cent attended secondary school).

Female income-generating activities may be understood in two ways, even though unemployment is rife in urban areas, at 41.5 per cent, and in rural areas, at 34.1 per cent.

5.1 Working at home occupies some women in the home.

There is still a very large number of women in this sector, which is regarded as informal in view of the particular nature of the rules on which it is based with regard to both its functioning and its characteristic dimensions.

In order to remedy the situation, in 1998 the authorities promulgated two regulations on work at home and part-time work, which primarily concern women as economic agents.

The advantage introduced by these regulations relates to social coverage enabling women who work at home to contribute to social security and benefit from the retirement system.

5.2 Considering employment in terms of branches of activity underscores two basic characteristics.

The administration and services sectors remain the largest sources of jobs for women. For example, 42.48 per cent of them are state employees in the education sector.

The existence of activities linked to agriculture and the crafts industry, which enable rural women to ensure family food security and acquire a surplus that can be sold in order to cover other financial needs of the family.

The integration of women into the development process has also been brought about in recent years through a project component providing advisory services in which several girls were trained. The development projects agreed upon concern agricultural and animal husbandry activities within the framework of community development, which currently employ 300 girls in small and medium-size enterprises (fruit trees, weaving looms, literacy programmes, milk production, cattle breed improvement ...). These measures were carried out with the financial support of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Accordingly, the informal sector constitutes a substantial source of work for women in search of employment and a rich resource which should be exploited within the framework of strengthening the development process.

6. Equality in decision-making

Discriminatory practices have often been cited to explain the absence or exclusion of women from decision-making centres. In this connection, it should also be stressed that the weak political commitment on the part of women seen in previous years aggravated this situation.

Since public awareness of the situation has increased, it is being redressed through a greater presence of women in public life:

(a) Two women are currently holding posts of Ministers: National Solidarity, and the Family and Culture;

(b) Nine women have been members of the Council of the Nation since January 1998, including one who is chairperson of the Commission on Social Affairs and another who is co-chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Commission;

(c) Within the framework of political pluralism, 13 women were elected and are members of the National People's Assembly;

(d) More than 10 women hold the posts of principal directors in the public administration;

(e) More than 90 women hold high-level public administration posts (assistant directors, chief executive assistants, advisers and executive assistants);

(f) One hundred thirty-seven women were elected to municipal and provincial popular assemblies and thus take part in managing the everyday affairs of towns;

(g) Many women participate in the movement to form political, social, cultural and scientific associations.

7. Protection of the girl child

In addition to the measures which have been taken by the authorities in order to guarantee schooling for girls in even the most remote areas by providing financial and material assistance (scholarships, canteens, boarding schools, transportation ...), activities have been carried out to increase awareness of the benefits of schooling and literacy.

The authorities are also working to design and distribute guides containing practical information on the rights of the child, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Algeria in December 1992, and the principles set forth in Algerian legislation.

Attention has been paid to the girl child in the context of the family code as well. Even though the amendments which have been made concern both boys and girls, they will have a definite impact on the future of girls, in that they provide for:

(a) Preservation of the home for the benefit of the person who has *Hadanah* (custody) of the children, until they reach the age of majority;

(b) Collection of support by the divorced wife through garnishing at the source;

(c) Recognition of agreement on names to avoid shocks arising from the discovery of one's real parentage;

(d) Establishment of paternity by scientific methods and through advances in genetics; this will help reduce the vulnerability of girls in particular, since boys are often shielded for cultural reasons which still prevail in some environments.

8. Violence against women

Violence against women is not a feature of Algerian society, for a variety of reasons deriving both from socio-economic factors and from traditional practices.

Social violence perpetrated against women is declining steadily because of the positive change in outlooks, the role of the media, the schools, and communication within the family.

It should be noted, in this connection, that Algeria's ratification in 1996 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has contributed to this change.

Despite certain reservations, which do not affect the basic provisions of the Convention, this accession shows the determination of the Algerian authorities to accord full attention to women, as is demonstrated by the reality of the emancipation of women.

On the other hand, violence resulting from terrorist acts, in which women continue to be the main targets of armed groups, does need to be fought.

The situation is all the more disturbing in that the rapes of several women who had been kidnapped led the authorities, in 1998, to take steps to alleviate the physical and moral suffering of this category of women by making it possible for them to have abortions under the same conditions as abortion for therapeutic reasons.

Measures to combat violence have been strengthened by the opening of several centres providing psychological services for women and children.

Moreover, some of the amendments made to the family code, have helped to alleviate certain types of moral coercion against women, by *inter alia*:

(a) Restricting the practice of polygamy, which now requires the prior consent of the two wives,

(b) Making it incumbent on the husband to show consideration for his wife and to safeguard her honour and dignity;

(c) Abolishing exploitative divorce, whereby a husband could obtain a divorce at will;

(d) Protecting the wife's right to participate in the formation of family assets through her contributions.

Conclusions

Given the progress made by women in various spheres, the results of the fulfilment of the commitments undertaken by Algeria following the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 may be regarded as positive.

Coordinated sectoral policies, based on consultations and dialogue, have made it possible to achieve strategic objectives; there is now an urgent need to maintain the momentum resulting from the efforts made by all the partners involved in the advancement of women.

The consolidation of these achievements, however, depends on the launching and completion of other actions to benefit women.

In particular, measures must be taken to improve the situation of single mothers, and to deal with domestic violence, abandonment of children and parents and child abuse.

Establishing reliable data banks and setting up information networks are some of the activities that will have to be carried out in the near future, with the cooperation of United Nations agencies.

Lastly, the authorities and women's advocates are also seeking to develop communications between various elements of society.